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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, October 6, continue to highlight stories related to developments in Iraq and the Palestinian territories. All papers highlight reports about King Abdullah's mediation efforts to set a meeting between the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister Sharon on or about October 10.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The trick of reform"

Columnist Manar Rashwani writes on the op-ed page of independent, centrist Al-Ghad Arabic daily (10/06): "What do we mean by reform and how do we implement it? The most familiar and granted answer is represented in the word 'democracy', but is it really democracy? Let's say that it is the correct answer and that it is the key to everything we have wanted and been waiting for. Here's another question: what is the democracy that we seek to implement really? Is it just legislative and municipal elections in accordance with the concept of democracy that the United States is promoting in our countries and that yielded nothing but a model of 'illiberal democracy'? Then again, what about our endless debate with regard to the relationship between Islam and democracy? This last question is part of the bigger and present issue of the role of religion in the Arab and Muslim society, a matter that will dictate posing another question about the form of Arab reform: will it be secular or religious, extremist or moderate? The best answer to the question of reform may just be democracy, with all its features, particularly respect for human rights and basic freedoms, as well as political pluralism and the majority rule. Yet, we must wonder: what are we to do with regard to human rights at the level of minority groups, be they ethnic, religious or sectarian? And what are we to do about poverty and unemployment, the responsibility for which we put on the shoulders of our governments that surrendered to the so-called 'economic reform' programs? Can we really declare a unilateral disengagement from the IMF and the World Bank? It seems that any attempt to find serious answers to the above questions will yield disappointment. We allege that all so-called 'reformist' Arab movements are no more than attempts to affect change that does not necessarily mean reform. In fact, they may very well lead to the re-creation of oppression and tyranny under new names and with unfamiliar faces. Our proof of this allegation is the absence of a genuine and comprehensive Arab reform project that includes all social, economic, political and cultural aspects and presents a futuristic vision capable of accurately identifying human values".

-- "Too much talk, too little deeds"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back-page of independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad (10/06): "The Arabs fear Iran's influence in Iraq and it is a legitimate and justified fear. Yet, the responsibility for the growth of the Iranian presence in Iraq is borne, in part, by the Arabs who were absent from Iraq at the same time when Iran was realizing the opportunity it had to strengthen its presence there. Iran succeeded in benefiting from the dismantling of the Iraqi state following the ousting of the former regime.... In return, the Arab countries exerted no effort towards developing its relations with the new Iraq. The Arabs adopted the same old tradition in their policy towards Iraq that they had followed with so many other issues: too much talk, too little deeds. The Arabs did not bother to make any initiatives towards Baghdad. As for the Iraqis, they felt let down by their neighbors, a

feeling that grew into skepticism and doubt of the Arab countries' intentions towards them and worry of any Arab initiative that intervenes in their affairs. After almost two and half years since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the Arab League is making a move towards Iraq in an effort to convene a general Iraqi conference that seeks to achieve national reconciliation. The move is late, but not so much so that it is impossible to achieve results towards getting Iraq out of its crisis. The Iraqis will appreciate the initiative if the Arab League deals with them on the basis of respect for their self-determination right and of a realistic approach that the past is gone and buried.... The Arab world is now paying the price for its delay in forming its policies on Iraq in accordance with the new facts on the ground following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. The opportunity is still here to set things right, and yet, any effort to put the Iraqi-Arab relations back on the right track requires an Arab realization that the Iraqis will only accept any Arab role if it clearly states respect for the right of the Iraqis to choose the future they want".

-- "Karen Hughes?!"

Columnist Amin Mashqabah writes on the op-ed page of leading semi-official Arabic daily Al-Rai (10/06): "We say here that the problem does not lie with the American people but with the policies in effect in the Middle East, particularly those adopted after 9/11. The new empire has been declared in the Middle East with clear and open strategic objectives for everyone to see, starting with the disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, through the fight against terrorism and extremism and the removal of dictatorial regimes, and ending with control over oil sources and the preservation of Israel's security and survival. Thus Afghanistan and Iraq were occupied and the new American model for democracy was established. And ever since the arrival of the conservative right wing into power, the Zionist ideologies were linked to American policies in the region. This is dividing line that must be recognized. The Zionist agenda controls the American decision-making process. As an Arab citizen, I'm not against American interests, but I am against the loss of peoples' legitimate rights and self-determination rights. The American policies are making Karen Hughes' mission of improving the U.S. dark image very difficult.... They say that they understand the Palestinian issue and talk about the need to establish a Palestinian state, but the U.S. administration has set free Sharon's hand to wipe out all forms of legitimate resistance for the Palestinian people on the pretext of fighting terrorism.... Hughes says that no one wants war, but who was it that launched the war on Iraq and continues to wage it? Who started the war on Afghanistan? Who is supporting the war in Palestine and the Occupied Territories? We are against terrorism, form and content, but who created the terrorism and the extremism other than the American policies, actions and wars in the region. Therefore, the majority of the people in this region believe that improving the American image cannot be done except by improving and changing the U.S. policies on the ground."

HALE